



RHODE ISLAND

2018 SNAPSHOT

Rhode Island is one of the 10 states selected to participate in New Skills for Youth (NSFY), an initiative enhancing state efforts to increase the number of learners across the country who are prepared for success in both college and career. NSFY is a \$75 million national initiative developed by JPMorgan Chase & Co. in collaboration with the Council of Chief State School Officers, Advance CTE and Education Strategy Group.

In the first two years of NSFY, Rhode Island established PrepareRI, a comprehensive initiative to promote career readiness for students across the state. With engagement from local industry leaders and policymakers, Rhode Island has successfully expanded high-quality career pathways and work-based learning (WBL) experiences for high school students.

In 2018, Rhode Island's three priority strategies were:

- **Operationalizing WBL statewide:** Rhode Island developed new definitions and guidance for high-quality WBL programs, selected a statewide intermediary to coordinate placements, and piloted the PrepareRI summer internship program for rising high school seniors.
- **Leveraging state funding to improve the quality of career pathways and secure equitable outcomes:** State leaders worked to align state funding with program quality, launch the new Innovation and Equity Grant program and restructure inter-district funding protocols.
- **Catalyzing innovation through PrepareRI ambassadors:** The PrepareRI ambassadors program, which provides stipends for local leaders to design and lead a PrepareRI project in their communities, was expanded significantly in size and scope following success during the 2017-18 pilot year.

The Rhode Island Context

Promoting career readiness for each of Rhode Island's students has been a focus of Governor Gina Raimondo's administration since she took office in 2015 and was a key item during her successful 2018 re-election campaign. The Raimondo administration launched the PrepareRI career readiness initiative in 2016 with support from the Career and Technical Education Board of Trustees, which was formed in 2014 to provide oversight and quality control for Career Technical Education (CTE), and the Governor's Workforce Board (GWB).¹

2018 SNAPSHOT

PrepareRI brings together multiple state and local programs for career pathway development and expansion. With the help of educators and employers throughout the state, PrepareRI aims to achieve four goals by 2020:

- Ensure that all students have access to career exploration opportunities;
- Ensure that all high school students have access to opportunities to earn college credit or an industry-recognized credential;
- Ensure that all high school students have access to WBL opportunities; and
- Ensure alignment of state investments in career pathway programs.

The early success of the PrepareRI initiative has benefited from Rhode Island’s statewide course choice policy. Course choice enables students to earn college credit or industry-recognized credentials through dual enrollment, Advanced Placement (AP) or WBL opportunities at any school district, postsecondary institution, or other eligible provider across the state. This policy significantly expands learners’ access to advanced coursework and other high-quality learning experiences that are unavailable in their home school.

At the beginning of the NSFY initiative, Rhode Island engaged local employers to review course offerings and established standards for student achievement, laying the foundation for a strong career preparation system. With the help of these local employers and PrepareRI ambassadors, Rhode Island has significantly expanded WBL and career pathway opportunities, and it has refined best practices to ensure equitable access for students throughout the state.

Operationalizing WBL Statewide

After establishing standards for WBL early in the NSFY initiative, the Rhode Island team focused its efforts in 2018 on setting up a statewide infrastructure for delivering WBL at scale. In January 2018, the GWB partnered with employers, educators and other stakeholders in the state to define and release guidance on implementing high-quality WBL.² The Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) adopted those GWB standards and declared that high-quality WBL must be a component of any CTE program seeking approval from RIDE. Rhode Island’s goal is to make high-quality WBL opportunities available in every high school by the end of 2019.

To help implement new opportunities, the GWB selected Skills for Rhode Island’s Future, a non-profit public-private partnership that matches local businesses with qualified local job seekers, to serve as a statewide career readiness intermediary.³ As Rhode Island’s intermediary, the organization is

GWB Recommendations for WBL				
The GWB recommends that all WBL activities be: ⁴				
Rigorous	Relevant	Reflective	Interactive	Integrated
<i>Are skill based and tied to measurable outcomes</i>	<i>Are connected to a student’s interests, as indicated in his or her individualized learning plan, and to the real world of work</i>	<i>Engage the student in reflection and analysis throughout and after the experience</i>	<i>Provide multiple and extended opportunities for students to interact with industry professionals</i>	<i>Are connected with the student’s school-based curriculum</i>

responsible for engaging employers, setting up WBL opportunities, and placing students in the workplace. While Skills for Rhode Island's Future has traditionally worked in talent recruitment for adults, it is extending its mission to youth by helping the GWB and RIDE set up the PrepareRI internship program, using its connections to establish WBL opportunities and taking on liability for student workers as the employer of record.

One of the first priorities for Skills for Rhode Island's Future was setting up the PrepareRI internship program, funded by the GWB. The program was launched in 2018, offering paid summer internships to rising high school seniors across the state.⁵ Before starting their internship, learners attend a PrepareRI bootcamp that establishes expectations for the program and reinforces the foundational skills learners need in the workplace. More than 600 learners applied for 162 internship openings, signaling a powerful interest among the high school student population. The goal is to double the number of internship opportunities available in 2019 to accommodate this interest. Overall, the first year of the PrepareRI internship program was a success, with every student completing his or her internship. Several participating students were even invited by their employers to continue their internship into the fall semester.

A notable and unique feature of the PrepareRI internship program is that completers can earn college credit for their internship work. Through a partnership with Roger Williams University, all PrepareRI internship participants earned six credits by completing internship journals and assignments, which were evaluated by university faculty. In summer 2019, Rhode Island College, one of the state's three public institutions, will grant college credits and conditional admission to all PrepareRI interns who successfully complete the program requirements.

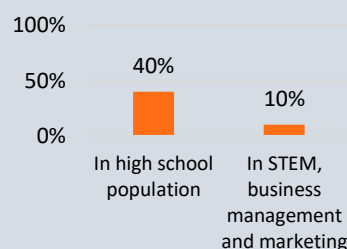
Reinforcing Rhode Island's WBL infrastructure is a statewide network of school-based career coordinators, who help students identify and pursue opportunities in their communities. Career coordinators are existing faculty members within the school who are designated by school leaders to be the points of contact between schools and Skills for Rhode Island's Future. This network was formally announced at RIDE's March 2018 PrepareRI summit, though a similar but more fragmented network of "school-based coordinators," who helped support and advise CTE students, did exist before. As of fall 2018, 93 percent of schools had appointed a career coordinator, exceeding the 90 percent goal set by the state.

Leveraging State Funding to Improve the Quality of Career Pathways and Secure Equitable Outcomes

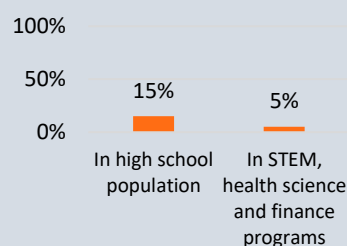
Rhode Island made strides in 2018 toward ensuring both quality and equitable outcomes for learners in career pathway programs. A new program approval policy adopted in 2018 requires all state-funded CTE programs to be aligned with high-wage, high-demand industries. Most of these industries are in the science, technology, engineering and math (STEM)

Statewide Equity Gaps in Rhode Island CTE Programs¹

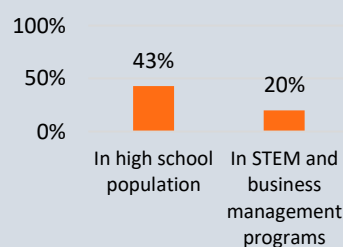
Students of Color



Students With Disabilities



Students Living in Poverty



RIDE's Innovation and Equity Grant program invests in local solutions to close access and completion gaps in CTE programs.

fields, as determined through the evaluation of local labor market needs and with input from Rhode Island industry leaders.⁶ While local program leaders can still sustain programs through other funding sources, this policy change has served as an incentive to transition career pathways to focus on high-wage, high-demand industries. In total, 45 new CTE programs were launched in 2018, 75 percent of them in high-wage, high-demand fields.

Rhode Island's goal is for 100 percent of career pathways to meet state-defined standards for quality by the end of 2019. As state leaders get closer to meeting this objective, one challenge that has emerged is developing a concrete definition and criteria for identifying "high-wage, high-demand" industries. Recognizing that today's "high-demand" industries will look very different in five or 10 years, Rhode Island is working with labor economists and policy researchers to revise its definitions and ensure that students are gaining future-proof skills that will have value throughout their careers.

Separately, Rhode Island launched a \$1.2 million Innovation and Equity Grant program in January 2018 to support local efforts to help underrepresented learners access and succeed in career pathways. The Innovation and Equity Grant program is organized around three objectives:

1. To expand access to CTE for student populations that are currently underserved;
2. To align CTE programs to a priority sector industry (as defined by the GWB); and
3. To meet the industry-specific content standards adopted by the Career and Technical Education Board of Trustees.

Of the 26 schools that applied for the grant, eight were selected. The selection process focused on evidence-based action plans for addressing equity challenges and barriers to access to CTE among specific student populations.⁷ Each recipient will receive \$150,000 to work over two years toward closing specific equity gaps.

Catalyzing Innovation Through PrepareRI Ambassadors

To help coordinate and expand local delivery of career pathways, Rhode Island has continued building upon its PrepareRI ambassadors program. The PrepareRI ambassadors are a group of education leaders from different parts of the state — including principals, school administrators, teachers and

Local Innovation and Equity Grant Highlight: The Met's Finance Program

The Met, a WBL-focused CTE center that serves about 800 students statewide, is one of the eight recipients of Rhode Island's Innovation and Equity grants. The school is one of the most diverse institutions in the state — 69 percent of learners in the program receive free or reduced-price lunch — so school leaders decided to apply for the equity grants to help boost engagement and enrollment in high-quality career pathways. Using funds from the grant, school leaders were able to conduct a comprehensive needs assessment and identify low participation in the Finance Career Cluster®. Now the Met is working to recruit low-income learners into the Finance program and help them earn high-value credentials, such as QuickBooks certification, that have immediate value in the labor market. There were 24 learners in the program in the 2017-18 school year, and school leaders aim to get up to 45 learners a year.



*Image provided by
the Met High School*

college professors — who are helping to guide PrepareRI’s implementation across the state. The program began with six ambassadors in the 2017-18 school year and was expanded to 22 ambassadors for 2018-19.⁸

While ambassadors continue working in their full-time jobs, they receive stipends of \$5,000 to implement specific projects in their communities. These projects have included establishing new WBL programs, encouraging students to pursue summer internships, and instituting individualized learning plans at schools.⁹ The program allows state leaders at RIDE to catalyze local innovation and invest in promising projects and practices in school buildings and classrooms across the state. Some of the projects spearheaded by PrepareRI ambassadors have even been scaled to other areas of the state. Funding for the PrepareRI ambassador program comes directly from NSFY, though RIDE is working to secure funding to continue the program after the NSFY period ends.

Looking Ahead

In the final year of NSFY, the state team expects to continue its strong push to expand career readiness initiatives throughout the state. Governor Raimondo’s re-election in November 2018 all but ensures that the work will be sustained through the remainder of her term. Priority work for the year ahead includes putting the final pieces of the state’s PrepareRI vision in place, expanding the summer internship program, and integrating apprenticeships into the PrepareRI program.

In 2019 RIDE will continue building connections with postsecondary institutions, with plans in place to pilot a postsecondary internship program for first-generation college students with the help of a grant from the National Governors Association Work-Based Learning Policy Academy. This new program will be piloted in summer 2019 using Skills for Rhode Island’s Future as an intermediary. It will employ many of the same design elements as the PrepareRI high school summer internship program, including the work readiness bootcamp model.

The state will also work to better align high school CTE course offerings with postsecondary options to ease the process of awarding industry-recognized credentials and college credits to high school students. This alignment will require significant input from faculty at the postsecondary level to ensure that high school students are able to more easily transition into higher education. To reinforce postsecondary pathways within the PrepareRI initiative and help learners transition from secondary to postsecondary education, RIDE also plans to implement a College Readiness Project in partnership with the Rhode Island colleges and universities. A major goal of the project is to increase the statewide Free Application for Federal Student Aid completion rate to 85 percent for the 2018-19 school year, with every school reaching a minimum of 70 percent. RIDE set up a statewide dashboard to foster competition and plans to award \$25,000 in scholarships to schools with the highest completion rates.¹⁰

Acknowledgments

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¹ PrepareRI. Who we are. Retrieved from <https://www.prepare-ri.org/who-we-are>

² Rhode Island Governor's Workforce Board. (2018). *Defining work-based learning activities and standards*. Retrieved from https://static1.squarespace.com/static/59a81489579fb39e3ef2232f/t/5a8efdf0d929795394744b2/1519320576464/GWB-WBL-Guidance_COMBINED.pdf

³ Skills for Rhode Island's Future. Retrieved from <https://www.skillsforri.com/>

⁴ Rhode Island Governor's Workforce Board. (2018). *Defining work-based learning activities and standards*. Retrieved from https://static1.squarespace.com/static/59a81489579fb39e3ef2232f/t/5a8efdf0d929795394744b2/1519320576464/GWB-WBL-Guidance_COMBINED.pdf

⁵ PrepareRI. PrepareRI internship program. Retrieved from <https://www.prepare-ri.org/internships/>

⁶ The Brookings Institution. (2016). Rhode Island innovates: A competitive strategy for the Ocean State. Retrieved from <https://www.brookings.edu/research/rhode-island-innovates-a-competitive-strategy-for-the-ocean-state/>

⁷ Rhode Island Department of Education. (2018). RIDE awards nearly \$1.2 million to increase equity in career education. Retrieved from <http://www.ride.ri.gov/InsideRIDE/AdditionalInformation/News/ViewArticle/tabid/408/ArticleId/481/RIDE-Awards-Nearly-1-2-Million-to-Increase-Equity-in-Career-Education.aspx>

⁸ PrepareRI. PrepareRI ambassadors. Retrieved from <https://www.prepare-ri.org/ambassadors/>

⁹ Rhode Island Department of Education. *The 2017-18 PrepareRI ambassadors*. Retrieved from <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/59a81489579fb39e3ef2232f/t/5b688bc81ae6cf9e4804a18e/1533578186012/Ambassadors+2017-18+project+summaries.pdf>

¹⁰ Rhode Island Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner. (2018). RI education leaders launch FAFSA dash. Retrieved from https://www.riopc.edu/news/fafsa_dashboard/